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He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; Many will see and fear and will trust in the Lord.

-The Psalmist[2]

Right now, the Church rules the nations of the world. We and we alone have been given power and dominion, and if we don't like the way things are going, we have only ourselves to blame.

-James B. Jordan[3]

The culture is a reflection of the Church, and music is a commentary on the culture. Music, in turn, influences the culture.[4] It's cyclical like vinyl spinning on the turn table. If God's people ever want to break the cycle, we need to lift the needle and put on a new record.

Fundamentalists rant and rail about both our culture and the music of our culture. They don't realize that it's all a result of the song the Church has been playing since "The Dispensationalists" became the hottest band in the Christian world back at the turn of the 20th century. John Nelson Darby was the warmup act before C.I. Scofield stole the show. Today,

God's people still can't get Scofield's tune out of their heads, and the world is simply dancing along.

Dispensationalism's doomsday dirge has been echoed in numerous popular tunes of our time. From CCR's "Bad Moon Rising," [5] to Europe's "Final Countdown," [6] to Metallica's "Four Horsemen," [7] many songs parrot the common understanding of New Testament prophecy in contemporary Christian theology. Needless to say, the songwriters didn't have the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 in mind when they penned their chart-toppers.

Perhaps the most popular example is Prince's "1999." This hit aptly captured what would eventually become the Y2K craze. It's hard to refrain from the song's catchy refrain: "Say, say, 2000-00, party over, Oops, out of time, So tonight I'm gonna party like it's 1999." [8] Much to Dispensationalism's dismay, "2000-00" scored a zero on the prophecy charts, and another decade came and went without an apocalyptic trace.

"Hello, I'm Jonny Cash"

While the Purple One utilized the Armageddon theme as a simple lyrical trope, the Man in Black took doomsday in a more serious tone. In "Matthew 24 (is Knocking on the Door)," [9] Johnny Cash's lyrical talent brilliantly weaves together Dispensationalism's less-than-brilliant take on many prophetic passages in the Bible:

I heard on the radio rumors of war
People gettin' ready for battle
And there may be just one more

I heard 'bout an earthquake
And the toll it took away
These are the signs of the times we're in today

Matthew 24 is knockin' at the door
And there can't be too much more to come to pass
Matthew 24 is knockin' at the door
And a day or one day more could be the last

The great bear from the Northland
Has risen from his sleep
And the army ranks in red are near
Two hundred million deep

The young and old now prophesy
A coming prince of peace
And last night I dreamed of lightning in the east

Matthew 24 is knockin' at the door
And there can't be too much more to come to pass
Matthew 24 is knockin' at the door
And a day or one day more could be the last

Johnny Cash's contemporary, Barry McGuire, famously sang, "But you tell me over and over and over again my friend, Ah, you don't believe we're on the eve of destruction."^[10] As it turns out, McGuire's "friend" in the song was right all along. That was 1965, and we weren't on the eve of destruction after all. But we were on the eve of Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth*. This bestseller would hit the bookshelves in 1970, and its impact would be felt at every level – even at the level of arts and entertainment.

The Bob Dylan Effect

Bob Dylan was unquestionably one of the most influential artists of our time, and the artist himself wasn't without his own influences. In an article entitled "The Hal Lindsey Effect: Bob Dylan's Christian Eschatology," Jeffrey Lamp of Oral Roberts University writes, "Hal Lindsey's eschatology functions in a multi-faceted way in Dylan's thought."^[11] Lamp gives obvious examples, like this line from Dylan's song *When You Gonna Wake Up*: "There's a sword being flashed for all those in sorrow and despair, you won't find it so hard to imagine when you meet it in the middle of the air."^[12] On a deeper level than the lyrics of the songs themselves are the words Dylan frequently spoke during his concerts before those songs. Lamp gives the following examples:

"You know we're living in the last days of the end of times. In the last days of the end of times, you're going to need something strong to hang on to, so this song is called 'Hanging On To A Solid Rock Made Before The Foundation Of The World.' You're gonna need something that strong."^[13]

"I suppose you've been reading the newspapers and watching the TV? And you see how much trouble this world is in. Madmen running loose everywhere. Anyway we, we're not worried about that though — it doesn't bother us — because we know this world is going to be destroyed. Christ will set up his kingdom for a thousand years in Jerusalem where the lion will lie down with the lamb — we know this is true. No doubt about it. So, it's a slow train coming. It's been coming for a long time, but it's picking up speed."^[14]

"All right. Now don't be dismayed by what you read in the newspapers about what's happening to the world. Because, now, the world as we know it now is being destroyed. I'm sorry to say it, but it's . . . it's the truth. In the matter of a short time—I don't know, maybe in three years, maybe five years, could be ten years, I don't know—there's gonna be a war. It's gonna be called the war of Armageddon. It's gonna happen in the Middle East. Russia's gonna come down and attack first and you watch for that sign. Anyway, we're not worried about that. We know there's gonna be a new kingdom set up in Jerusalem for a thousand years. And that's where

Jesus will set up his kingdom, as sure as you're standing there, it's gonna happen. So this is called, "Hanging On To A Solid Rock Made Before The Foundation Of The World."^[15]

The Times They Aren't A-Changin'

One of Dylan's most popular songs is, "The Times They Are A-Changin'."^[16] But not much has changed in the world of Dispensationalism over the last few decades. They continue to claim that we're in the last decade – decade after decade. The trouble is that today's younger Dispensationalists aren't familiar with the songs of previous decades.

In his article, Lamp notes Dylan's "appeal to current events as portents of the approaching end of times."^[17] This is Dispensationalism 101, and you didn't need to go to a seminary to learn it. All you had to do was go to a Bob Dylan concert. The problem is that Dylan was wrong, Hal Lindsey was wrong, and all the Dispensationalists of their day were wrong. The world didn't end in "three years," in "five years," or even "ten years," as Dylan predicted. Nonetheless, Dispensationalists are still blasting the same tune today, and that's the real problem.

When I was a teenager, I heard Bruce Springsteen's cover of "War," by Edwin Starr. I loved the song and thought it was one of the Boss's best. It was only later that I learned Springsteen wasn't the original artist. A similar phenomenon is happening with the current generation of younger Christians. The performers stealing the show today are men like David Jeremiah, Greg Laurie and Jack Hibbs. They assure their screaming fans that current events equal Biblical portents. With the book sales soaring and the money pouring, everyone is "holding steady" and "rapture ready". Even today, Dispensationalists still insist that the time is "nearing midnight".^[18] What today's young people don't realize is that this song has been done already.

If you're a younger believer today, the conditions of the world have most likely left you dismayed. And rightly so. But the cultural decline isn't a prophetic sign. On the contrary, it's a pathetic sign. It's a sad indication that the previous generation left yours behind as they waited anxiously for Jesus to take them to the sweet by and by. Rather than working to change the world, God's People have been looking for Him to come and take them out of the world. David Chilton accurately summarized the mentality that has yielded the results that we now see all around us:

"For too long, Christians have been characterized by despair, defeat, and retreat. For too long, Christians have heeded the false doctrine which teaches that we are doomed to failure, that Christians cannot win – the notion that, until Jesus returns, Christians will steadily lose ground to the enemy. The future of the Church, we were told, is to be a steady slide into apostasy. Some of our leaders sadly informed us that we are living in a 'Laodicean age' of the Church (a reference to the 'lukewarm' church of Laodicea, spoken of in Rev. 3:14-22). Any new outbreak of war, any rise in crime statistics, any new evidence of the breakdown of the family, was often oddly viewed as progress, a step forward toward the expected goal of the total collapse of civilization, a sign that Jesus might come to rescue us at any moment. Social action projects were looked on with skepticism: it was often assumed that anyone who actually tried to

improve the world must not really believe the Bible, because the Bible taught that such efforts were bound to be futile; as one famous preacher put it, 'You don't polish brass on a sinking ship.' That slogan was based on two assumptions: first, that the world is nothing more than a 'sinking ship'; second, that any organized program of Christian reconstruction would be nothing more than 'polishing brass.' Evangelism was an invitation to join the losing side." [19]

David Chilton wrote this in 1987. And it still holds true today. Modern Christians are slow to change the station despite the fact that Dispensationalism is nothing more than a long series of failed prophecies based on a faulty interpretation of Scripture. They continue to listen to the same songs, even after all this time.

Sinking Ships and New Songs

The "sinking ship" mentality began when John Nelson Darby sang his tune in the early to mid-1800s, and that ship was sailing at full speed ahead by the end of the 19th century. Prior to that, God's people envisioned a Gospel that would permeate every area of life and every aspect of society. [20] As the late Gary North wrote, "Christians haven't taken seriously this vision of victory since the 1870's ... For over a century, this vision faded in the hearts and minds of regenerate people. A vision of defeat, in time and on earth, replaced the older vision of victory. The churches went into hiding, culturally speaking. They left the battlefield, and the humanists won by default." [21]

By the turn of the 20th century, the *Scofield Reference Bible* with its Dispensational reference notes was the Church's manual of survival. The defeatist mentality then hit an all-time high with the works of Hal Lindsey in the 1970s, and the failed predictions soon followed. The fundamental error of the fundamentalists was the propensity to interpret fulfilled prophecy as unfulfilled. Lindsey told the believers of his day that they were "the terminal generation," but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand that "this generation" (Matt. 24:34) meant the generation to whom Jesus was speaking. The truth is that Matthew 24 was knocking at the door of the disciples, rather than the door of Christians today, and that door swung wide open when Jerusalem's walls were broken, and the Romans destroyed the city in AD 70.

The condition of the world today isn't a sign of the times, but it is a sign that the Church's eschatology has influenced the times. And today, the sign on the Dispensationalists' door says: "Rapture Postponed: New Date Coming Soon." Indeed, 2028 has become the new 1988, [22] and believers are spinning the same record all over again. It's time for believers to stop, think, and learn, and let the Dispensational ship sink into the depths, never to return. We need to break the cycle. If you are a young believer, don't waste your life waiting for Jesus to take you out of the world. Spend your life working to change the world instead. Leave a better world to the next generation than the world the previous generation left to you. Dispensationalism got it wrong, and it's time for God's people to sing a new song (Psalm 40:3).

[1] Many thanks to Daniel E. Harden and Eric Ogea for their invaluable input and suggestions.

[2] Psalm 40:3

[3] <http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/biblical-horizons/no-20-who-rules-the-land-the-meaning-of-the-noahic-covenant-part-2/>

[4] <https://www.savethemusic.org/blog/advocacy/how-does-music-affect-society/#:~:text=Music%20has%20shaped%20cultures%20and,may%20not%20be%20immediately%20apparent.>

[5] <https://zinginstruments.com/songs-about-the-end-of-the-world/>

<https://www.countrythangdaily.com/bad-moon-rising-ccr/?fbclid=IwAR3xW-6YKwxZiExY5mEaLF89jeRloAljJ5NDQyReihNN6WO0MzqEXPYs02k>

[6] <https://genius.com/Europe-the-final-countdown-lyrics>

[7] <https://genius.com/Metallica-the-four-horsemen-lyrics>

[8] <https://www.bing.com/search?q=1999+lyrics+&qsn&form=QBRE&sp=-1&ghc=1&lq=0&pq=1999+lyrics+&sc=11-12&sk=&cvid=B707F570AE754D85B833CB59F9661290&ghsh=0&ghacc=0&ghpl=>

[9] <https://genius.com/Johnny-cash-and-june-carter-cash-matthew-24-is-knocking-at-the-door-lyrics>

[10] <https://genius.com/Barry-mcguire-eve-of-destruction-lyrics>

[11] <https://thedylanreview.org/2021/07/25/the-hal-lindsey-effect-bob-dylans-christian-eschatology/?fbclid=IwAR1uSOkCF5WIIgEjcT3mrQoXt7fvgxbuVT4MTvzdE2ESoqRElwDUR0bhT2w>

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Times_They_Are_a-Changin%27_\(song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Times_They_Are_a-Changin%27_(song))

[17] Lamp, Ibid.

[18] <https://www.raptureready.com/category/nearing-midnight/>

[19] David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 3.

[20] See: *The Book that Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization*, by Vishal Mangalwadi; *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Western Civilization*, by Alvin J. Schmidt *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born*, by D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcomb; *God and Government*, by Gary DeMar.

[21] Gary North, *Backward, Christian Soldiers?*, pp. ix-xi

[22] <https://burrosofberea.com/heres-hoping-a-future-generation-will-get-this-generation-right/>